

ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM IN BRAZIL

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It was during the first International Conference on the Environment and Development, The Earth Summit, that the environment gained more importance within the media. More than seven thousand professionals from the world of communication signed up to news agencies, magazines and television companies, among them, photographers, reporters and other experts in the field. Earth Summit brought environmental issues into every home, highlighting the importance of preserving the environment in order to maintain quality of life on the planet.

So it was, through newspapers and television that the question of the environment reached that segment of the community that before, had never had access to the subject. It was through the work of several pioneering journalists that important subjects like deforestation and land clearance through burning reached the general public. This was an important factor in creating a favorable context to create rules, regulations and laws to regularize and administer the natural resources of the country.

However, newspapers and television are still not able to cover this subject in full, because there still aren't enough professionals with sufficient knowledge to work with environmental sciences. Besides this, other subjects have been considered more important to the media, and the attention of the newspapers has been distracted. These problems still exist inside journalism today.

At this moment in time, it is important to discuss the question of journalistic training as the number of specialized publications is constantly rising. Since the dawn of television, the number of newspapers and magazines of a general nature has been diminishing, whilst the number of scientific and semi-scientific publications has been increasing. It is because of this that specialized training for journalists is required.

We must now make people understand the numerous changes which have become necessary in our lifestyles. We could call this process "scientific literacy", and this process could be made easier with the existence of adequate vehicles of communication and, seeming as the press is the link between society at large and the scientific community, through specialized journalists. These professionals should transmit clearly and simply to the majority of the people, what the scientists only express in obscure, incomprehensible language.

There are currently few journalists who specifically cover environmental issues and the majority of them have worked in this field for years. These journalists are consequently very specialized and their work stands out in today's coverage of the environment. This document introduces five journalists currently working in the forefront of environmental journalism, each one of them fulfilling a different role in the process of the production and the divulging of environmental information.

CASE STUDIES

Liana John - News Agency Reporter

Liana has been a journalist at Agência Estado for twelve years, with a total of seventeen years experience. She is responsible for the special material about the environment, and in addition to this, she writes a weekly column entitled "Ecos da Terra". She also edits a science and technology site on the internet. Her work is distributed to more than two hundred newspapers throughout the country, in addition to radio and television networks.

One piece she wrote opened the eyes of the public to the problem of land-burning. For ten years she let people know about the burning which went on throughout Brazil, and today the maps indicating the locations of the fires, appear in university entrance exams and in geography text books.

Alicia Ivanissevich - Science Editor

Alicia has been in the profession for fifteen years and today, is the scientific editor of *Ciência Hoje*, a magazine which specializes in science and technology, and which broaches environmental issues. The work of magazine is divided into the areas of humanities, science, biology and environmental science, with the majority of articles published today being about the environment. Alicia puts this down to the growing importance given to things concerning the environment and also to the existence of many scientific groups active in this area.

Washington Novaes - Columnist

Washington has been working as a professional journalist for forty three years and has been working for thirty years on the environment. He is currently working as a columnist. His work, which is totally independent, is published in two big Brazilian newspapers: *O Popular* and *O Estado de São Paulo*.

In his opinion, journalists need better training to work in the environmental field and the only solution to the problem is for universities to offer courses for journalistic specialization. According to Washington, this is due to the fact that environmental problems are becoming more complex: "We are no longer dealing with isolated cases, but with big problems which demand complex solutions".

Regina Scharf - Newspaper Reporter

Regina is a reporter for *Gazeta Mercantil*, a Brazilian newspaper catering to a public which mainly consists of businessmen and people with links to economic fields. She is the only journalist at the newspaper who specifically covers the environment.

In Regina's opinion, the media only refers to the environment when they are denouncing something. She says that "when there is a flood or drought in the north east of Brazil, there is a small footnote telling us what happened and showing people getting out of a boat. But no-one tries to evaluate whether this is increasing or decreasing, what aggravates the problem, what alleviates it. It's not only this denouncing that exists, there is also sensationalism". She believes that what is missing in the press is the divulgence of solutions, such as new technology.

Hiram Firmino - Freelance Editor

Editor of the *Estado Ecológico*, a pull-out section of the Brazilian newspaper, *Estado de Minas*, that is published at every full moon. Hiram specializes in environmental issues. The *Estado Ecológico* is the only supplement which was created at the time of The Earth Summit and is still in circulation today. It is currently one of the most profitable sections of the newspaper, being recognized internationally as one of the main ecological publications of Latin America. In Firmino's opinion, the importance of the environmental press is that it provides a service to humanity telling us why things are going wrong and shows solutions and results.

CONCLUSION

Today, the environment is one of mankind's major concerns. Currently, the whole world is looking to reconcile technological advances and provision of mans' necessities without, however, damaging our habitat.

Within this proposal, Brazilian journalism has contributed to the creation of an environmental conscience in society. But there a still few professionals who are apt at covering the issues fully. In the face of so many difficulties, however, it is down to the journalist working in this field to "spread the knowledge, teach to learn, to create the responsibility within his readers and audience. They must stimulate, orientate, and get the support to place the public before the enormity of science, forcing people to not only participate with their eyes and ears, but also with their intelligence and creative talent" (Ibero-American Conference on Scientific Journalism).

One of Brazil's greatest successes in relation to the environment, and in which the press helped as one of the engines responsible for the popularization of the environment in the country, was to have been one of the first countries in the world to dedicate an entire chapter of its constitution to the environment sharing the responsibility of preservation between the people and the government. Chapter IV of the Federal Constitution of 1988 cites that:

"Every person has the right to an ecologically balanced environment for the common use of the people and essential to a healthy quality of life, asserting on Public Authorities and the community the duty to defend it and preserve it for both present and future generations".



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Embrapa

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